

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. A method of retrieving electronic data from a communications system, the method
2 comprising:

3 establishing a connection to the communications system using a first account of a
4 user;

5 initiating a first communication session over the connection associated with the first
6 account of the user; and

7 automatically initiating over the same connection one or more additional
8 communication sessions associated with one or more additional accounts of the user.

1 2. The method of claim 1 further comprising accessing electronic data associated
2 with the first account of the user.

1 3. The method of claim 2 further comprising accessing electronic data associated with
2 the one or more additional accounts of the user.

1 4. The method of claim 1 further comprising accessing electronic data associated with
2 the one or more additional accounts of the user.

1 5. The method of claim 4 wherein accessing electronic data comprises retrieving e-
2 mail.

1 6. The method of claim 4 wherein accessing electronic data comprises sending e-
2 mail.

1 7. The method of claim 4 wherein accessing electronic data comprises downloading
2 one or more files.

1 8 The method of claim 4 wherein accessing electronic data comprises retrieving
2 messages posted on a message board.

1 9. The method of claim 4 wherein accessing electronic data comprises posting
2 messages to a message board.

1 10. The method of claim 1 wherein the first account and the one or more additional
2 accounts of the user comprise different screen names.

1 11. The method of claim 10 wherein automatically initiating one or more additional
2 communication sessions comprises automatically switching between the different screen
3 names.

1 12. The method of claim 1 further comprising setting preferences for initiating the
2 first communication session.

1 13. The method of claim 12 wherein setting preferences comprises scheduling a time
2 to initiate the first communication session.

1 14. The method of claim 1 further comprising setting preferences for initiating the
2 one or more additional communication sessions.

1 15. The method of claim 14 wherein setting preferences comprises scheduling a time
2 to automatically initiate the one or more additional communications session.

1 16. The method of claim 1 further comprising setting different preferences for
2 initiating the first communication session and for initiating the one or more additional
3 communication sessions.

1 17. The method of claim 1 wherein the first communication session is initiated
2 automatically.

1 18. The method of claim 1 further comprising running the first communication
2 session and the one or more additional communication sessions in parallel.

1 19. The method of claim 1 wherein the user comprises a single member of an online
2 service.

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1 20. The method of claim 1 wherein the user comprises multiple members of the
2 online service.

1 21. The method of claim 20 wherein the multiple members are related.

1 22. A computer program for retrieving electronic data from a communications
2 system the computer program being stored on a computer readable medium and comprising
3 instructions for:

4 establishing a connection to the communications system using a first account of the
5 user;

6 initiating a first communication session over the connection associated with the first
7 account of the user; and

8 automatically initiating over the same connection one or more additional
9 communication sessions associated with one or more additional accounts of the user.

1 23. The computer program of claim 22 wherein the computer readable medium
2 comprises a disc.

1 24. The computer program of claim 22 wherein the computer readable medium
2 comprises a client device.

1 25. The computer program of claim 22 wherein the computer readable medium
2 comprises a host device.

1 26. The computer program of claim 22 wherein the computer readable medium
2 comprises a propagated signal.

1 27. A communications apparatus for retrieving electronic data from a
2 communications system, the apparatus being configured to:
3 establish a connection to the communications system using a first account of the user;
4 initiate a first communication session over the connection associated with the first
5 account of the user; and

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- 6 automatically initiate over the same connection one or more additional
- 7 communication sessions associated with one or more additional accounts of the user.

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